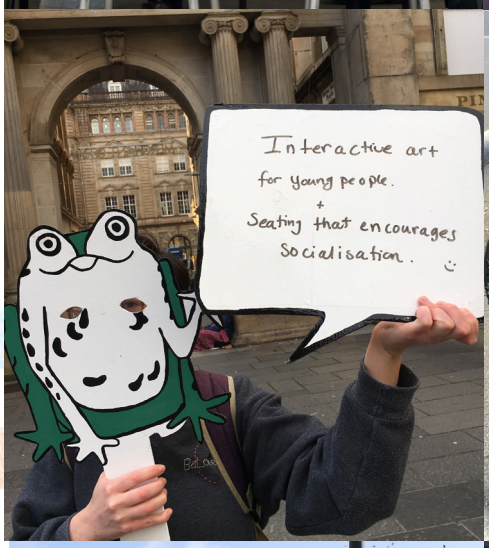

George Square:
Is it time for change?

Results of Citywide Conversation
December 2019

The citywide conversation about George Square has been facilitated by a team led by icecream architecture on behalf of Glasgow City Council.

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1868

1957

1990

2018

Introduction

George Square is Glasgow's civic centre and principal urban space—a place of city-wide, national and international interest. While it has remained a familiar landmark, the way it has been used has evolved over time by generations of Glaswegians. Today, the Square hosts a wide range of activities and events throughout the year.

Glasgow City Council's Strategic Plan (2017 to 2022), supports the development of a design strategy for the key civic space of George Square, following the completion of city centre developments.

As part of Glasgow City Council's people-centred approach to city centre regeneration, a citywide conversation was instigated to establish a fresh public perspective on George Square's place in the city, what it is used for, and the possibilities the future could hold.

A team from icecream architecture, Nick Wright Planning and Willie Miller Urban Design was appointed by Glasgow City Council to undertake engagement activities to facilitate the citywide conversation.

This document details the results of the citywide conversation. It also makes recommendations to Glasgow City Council on how George Square can be maximised as a civic asset of the city and ways that any possible change can be delivered.

	Main City Wide Conversation	Hands-On Workshops	Pop-up Exhibition
04/10 - 10/10	• Online Engagement via website • Social media • Paper surveys • Vox-pops		
11/10 - 17/10		**1** Couper Institute 17/10	
18/10 - 24/10		**1** **2** **3** 220 High Street 18/10 **4** Community Room, GCHT 19/10 **5** 231 George St. 23/10	
25/10 - 30/10		**6** Glasgow Chamber of Commerce presentation + discussion 28/10	**The New Glasgow Society** Part of 'Imagine Glasgow 2019: Visions from Scotland's New Architecture and Interior Design Talent' 25/10 - 27/10
06/11/2019	**Co-Creation Forum** **The Garment Factory** 12:00 - 16:30		

Methodology

The engagement team recognised that while the potential of change in George Square could generate significant interest, naturally there will be different levels of engagement that people are able to commit. To fulfil this, a common structure of tasks were set which could capture contributions form a variety of different methods.

What people think and feel about George Square today
Firstly focusing on the present; finding out the different ways people use George Square, the words and phrases they would use to describe it, and what place the feel it has within Glasgow.

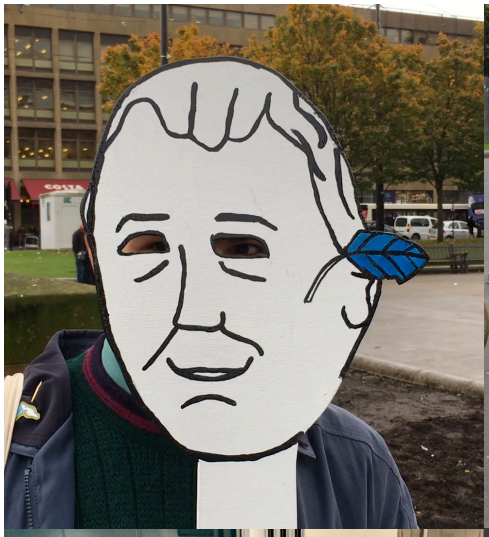
Secondly, looking at the different aspirations that exist for George Square. Mainly focusing on what it should be use for, but also capturing any other ideas or points of view.

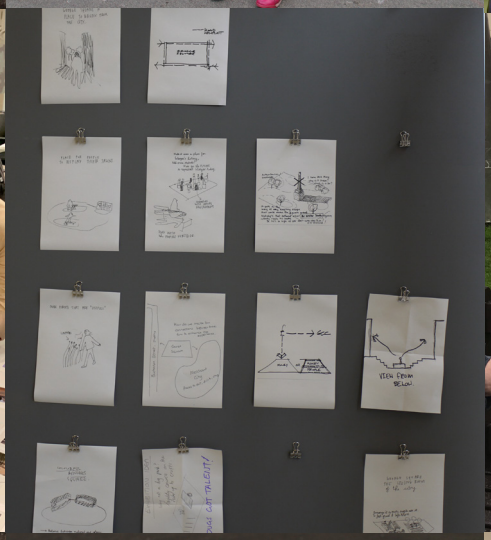
This was primarily captured through:
- Online tools (including social media)
- Paper surveys at 32 Glasgow Life libraries
- On street vox-pops
- Pop-Up exhibition of conversation so far at New Glasgow Society

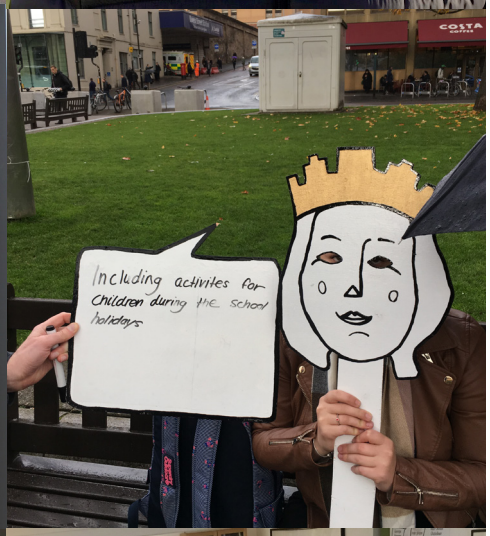
What might different viewpoints on George Square could mean for the people and city of Glasgow
Opportunities for those able, or interested, in dedicating more time were created through workshops. These allowed people to sit down with fellow Glaswegians and have in depth conversations about George Square, with a view of exploring deeper what effects (positive or negative) different changes might bring.

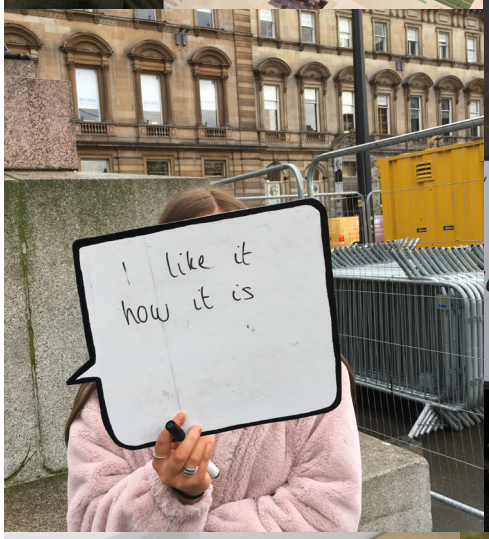
- Six 'Hands-On Workshops', each lasting 90 minutes
- Glasgow Chambers of Commerce presentation & discussion

Co-Creation Forum
This half-day event brought together a group of Glaswegians to reflect on what the citywide conversation had discovered and considered what next steps could be taken.

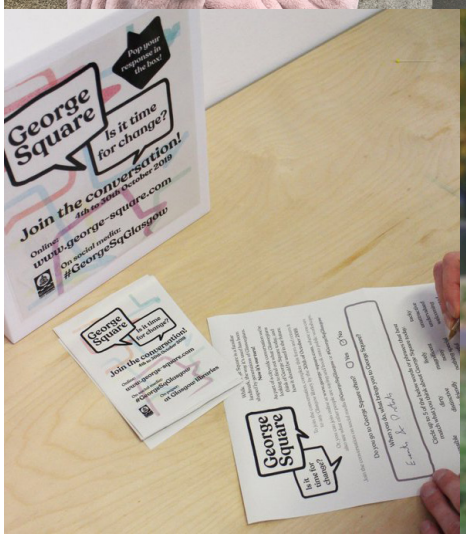





Including activites for children during the school holidays


I like it how it is

JUST DON'T LIKE THE FAIR THINGS!


George Square
Is it time for change?
Join the conversation!
4th to 30th October 2019
www.george-square.com
#GeorgeSqGlasgow

George Square
Is it time for change?

Level of Engagement

A variety of press and advertising methods were employed to generate interest in the citywide conversation. Over the course of the main conversation period, this generated a total of 2,267 submissions—the majority of which were online in some manner. Charts below show the breakdown of home location, age and gender identity of people who made a submission.

Submissions (4th to 30th October)

Survey on George Square today at www.george-square.com	1,322
Future ambitions submitted at www.george-square.com	343
Paper survey submissions	262
Social Media comments	205
On Street Vox-Pops	58
Comments on online articles	36
Other submissions (e.g. email or postal)	41

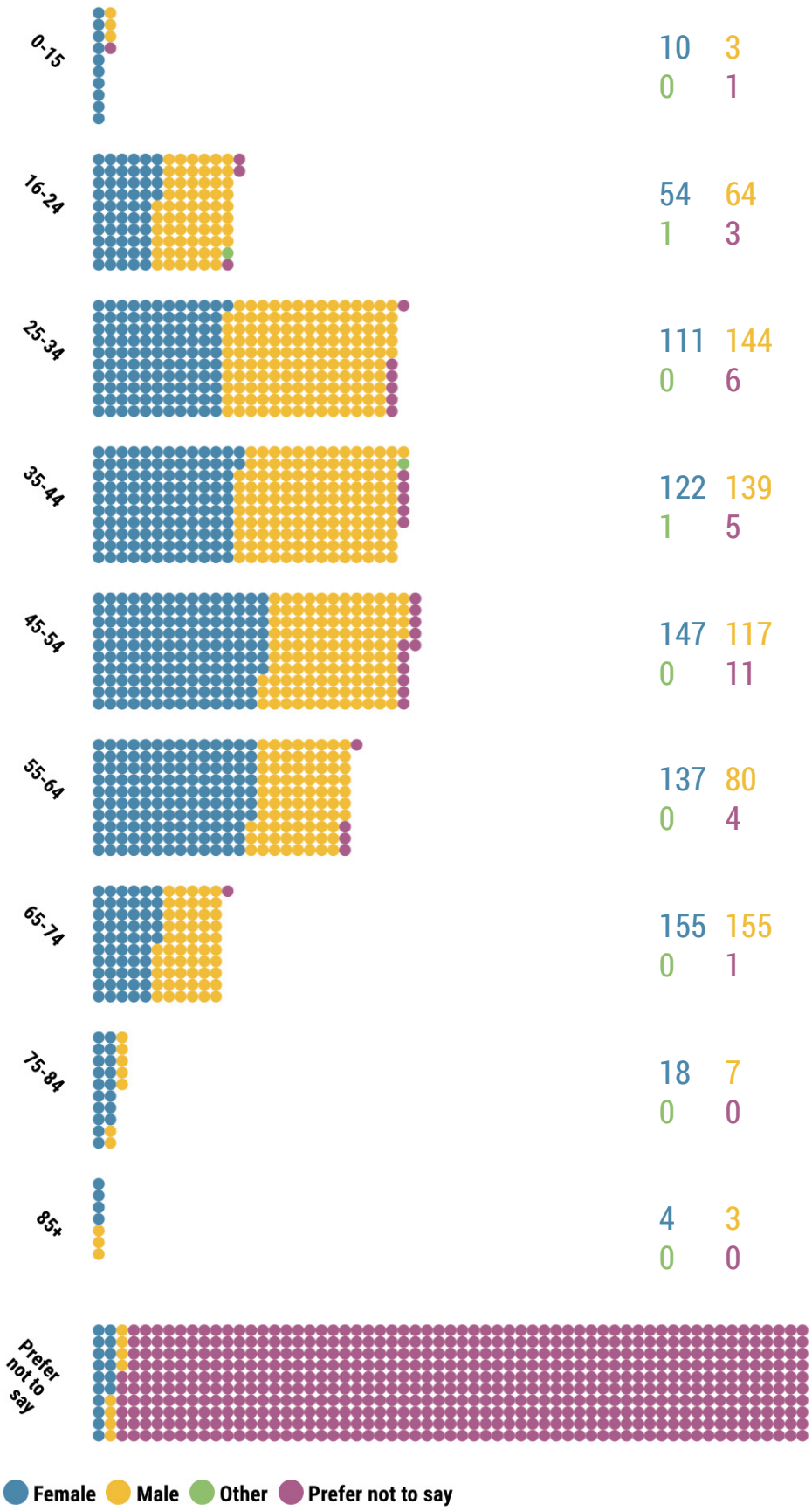
Note: Not everyone responded to each task. Therefore some results later in this document will be based on a smaller pool than the total number of submissions. For example we counted 793 "ambitions" for the future of George Square (343 were submitted through www.george-square.com, 199 through paper surveys, and 251 via online comments or other submissions). All submissions (regardless of method), have been combined to form the results.

Attendance at Events (Various Dates)

Hands-On Workshops	52
Visitors to Pop-Up Exhibition	71
Chamber of Commerce presentation & discussion	14
Co-Creation Forum	39

In October and November 2019, the website used to host online parts of the conversation (www.george-square.com) was viewed 7,988 times.

Age and gender identity of participants



Location of participants

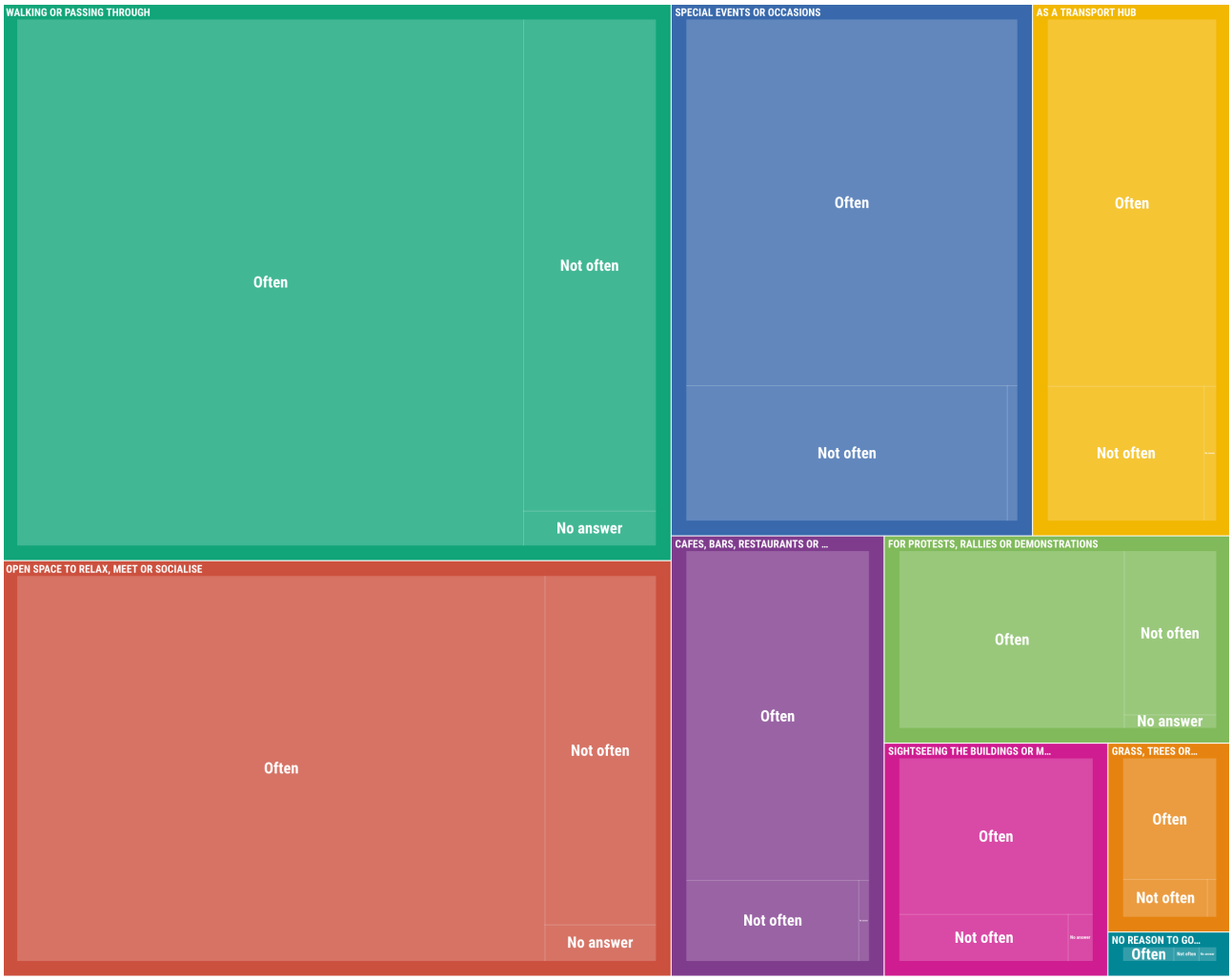
City Centre	104 (5%)
Glasgow East and North East	259 (14%)
Glasgow North and North West	273 (14%)
Glasgow South and South West	332 (17%)
Outside Glasgow	339 (18%)
Prefer not to say	606 (32%)

What people think and feel about George Square today.

How people use George Square today

People were asked what brought them to George Square as it is today, and if they went there often. The question was open-ended allowing people to use their own words that offers their personal perspective. Across all methods, a total of 1,478 shared what brings them to George Square today. These have been evaluated to find a common set of purposes.

The percentages mentioning each type of usage is outlined opposite. The below chart shows proportionally, how often each was mentioned, and the split between those who use it often or not. With the exception of 'no reason to go', there is no strong correlation between uses and whether people said the use George Square often or not.



Way of using George Square today	How often it was mentioned
Walking or passing through	mentioned by 51%
Open space to relax, meet or socialise	mentioned by 38%
Special events or occasions	mentioned by 26%
As a transport hub	mentioned by 14%
Cafés, bars, restaurants or shops	mentioned by 12%
For protests, rallies or demonstrations	mentioned by 10%
Sightseeing the buildings or monuments	mentioned by 7%
The grass, trees or flowers	mentioned by 3%
No reason to go there	mentioned by 1%

Describing George Square today

People were asked to select up to five different words or phrases that best matched what they think about George Square today. Based on analysis of previous discussions, comments and TripAdvisor reviews on George Square, a pool of 29 words or phrases were offered to choose from, or people could 'add their own'. The pool of words and phrases were selected so there was a range of **positive**, **ambiguous** and **negative** options to choose from.

Across all methods, a total of 1,627 people made selections of 7,219 words or phrases to describe George Square today—only four percent of submissions used the 'add your own' option.

From the pre-populated pool, 47% could be categorised as negative, 32% as ambiguous and 17% as positive. This is shown in the chart opposite, along with the proportion for each word choice and the number of times it was chosen shown in brackets.

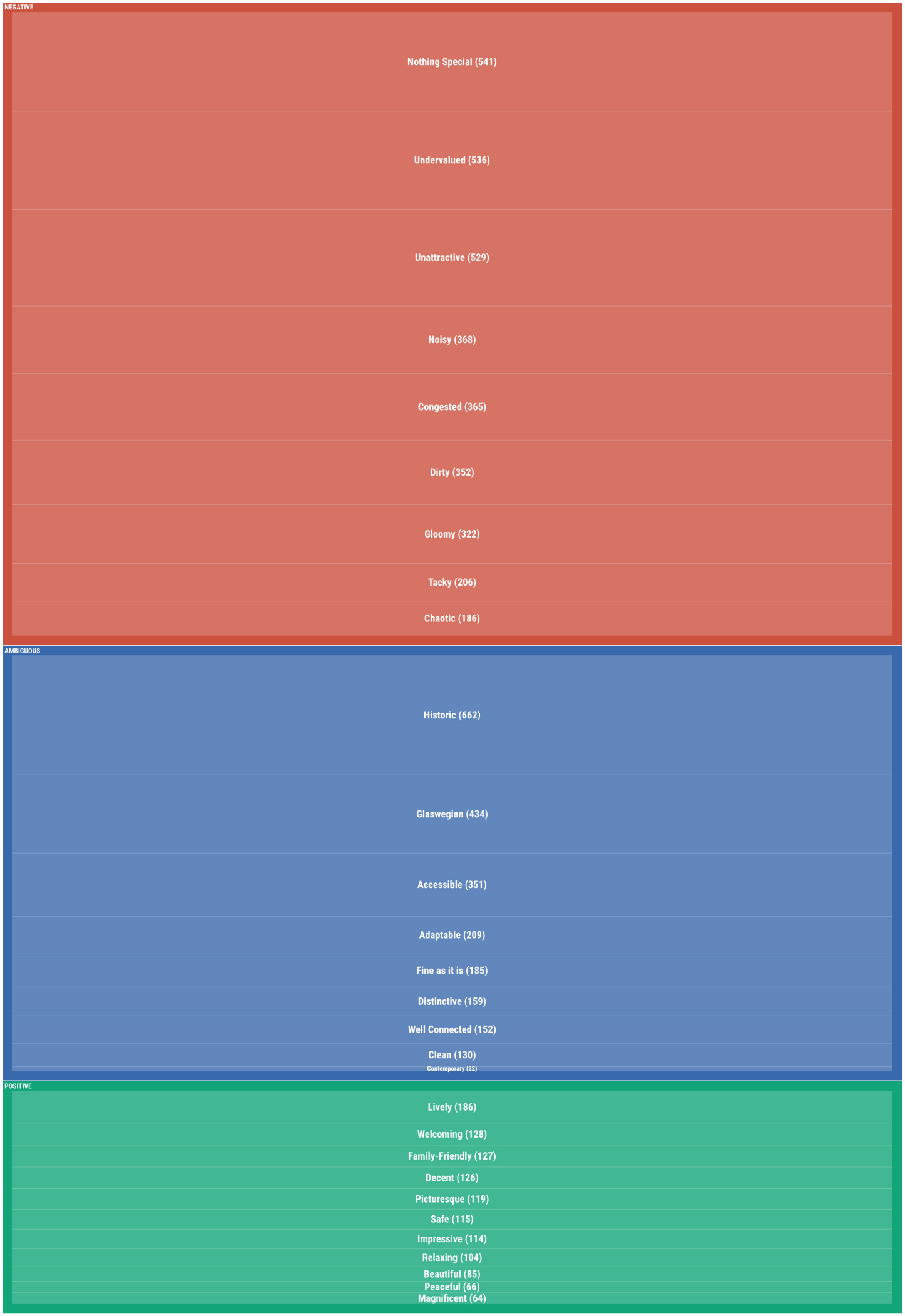
The five most and *least* frequently selected words or phrases were:

- **Historic** (662)
- **Undervalued** (536)
- **Unattractive** (541)
- **Nothing Special** (541)
- **Glaswegian** (434)
- ***Relaxing*** (104)
- ***Beautiful*** (85)
- ***Peaceful*** (66)
- ***Magnificent*** (64)
- ***Contemporary*** (22)

One trend to note, is of those who only selected one word or phrase (85 people), 44% was only using 'fine as it is', and was particularly prevalent on social media comments.

The most common response outwith the pool was variations of **too commercialised** (11), **neglected** (6), **boring** (5), **disappointing** (5) and **dull** (4).

While the mainstay of words and phrases are negative in character, during on street Vox-Pops there was often visitors who recognised and praised the beauty and architectural quality of George Square in its current condition.


NEGATIVE
Nothing Special (541)
Undervalued (536)
Unattractive (529)
Noisy (368)
Congested (365)
Dirty (352)
Gloomy (322)
Tacky (206)
Chaotic (186)
AMBIGUOUS
Historic (662)
Glaswegian (434)
Accessible (351)
Adaptable (209)
Fine as it is (185)
Distinctive (159)
Well Connected (152)
Clean (130)
Contemporary (22)
POSITIVE
Lively (186)
Welcoming (128)
Family-Friendly (127)
Decent (126)
Picturesque (119)
Safe (115)
Impressive (114)
Relaxing (104)
Beautiful (85)
Peaceful (66)
Magnificent (64)

What George Square means to Glasgow

In order to find out what place George Square has in the city of Glasgow today, people were asked to complete the sentence:

George Square is Glasgow's...

The question was open-ended allowing people to use their own words that offers their personal perspective. Across all methods, a total of 1,498 completed the sentence. These answers have been evaluated to find what the most common responses were. These are detailed below with a summarised completion of the sentence representing the main sentiment of responses, and the number of times recorded in brackets. Example quotes from submissions are also noted in *italics*.

George Square is Glasgow's... civic heart. (453)

"...heart of the city."

"...heart and soul."

"...unappreciated, disrespected and forgotten civic space."

"...historic heart that's been neglected for too long."

"...civic heart, and should reflect the vision of the city."

The majority of responses, referred to George Square as Glasgow's civic centre, civic heart, central civic square, or used these phrases in a number of variations. However, not all of these responses were positive; for instance, someone referred to George Square as a "broken heart" and another as a "heart, but its arteries are clogged by polluting traffic."

George Square is Glasgow's... iconic landmark. (141)

"...focal point of our great city."

"...best known landmark."

"...main square. It's fine leave it alone."

"...central focal point."

"...focal point, but it could be much more attractive."

"...iconic, historic and a very important place."

"...main focal point which should be vibrant, beautiful, welcoming and something to make you proud of."

The second highest response claimed George Square to be the main square, focal point, most important square, or one of Glasgow's most iconic or famous landmarks. Some felt that due to its iconic status it should not be changed and left alone; and for the same reason others felt that it was in need of development to maintain its status as the focal point of the city.

George Square is Glasgow's... missed opportunity. (121)

"...potential 'dear green place'."

"...most underutilised space with lots of potential."

"...opportunity to become a hub of restaurants and cafés which could spill out into the streets, similar to those found on the continent."

"...missed opportunity, it could be telling Glasgow's story to the world much better than it does."

121 of those responding focussed on a sense that George Square presents a missed or wasted opportunity and is a place which has been forgotten about or neglected. There is a strong feeling that George Square has been underutilised, unloved and abused, but has potential for improvement with some 'TLC'.

George Square is Glasgow's... meeting point. (102)

"...place for having a seat, meeting friends+family,spending time in and celebrating."

"...central gathering point for its citizens, be it to voice and demonstrate political opinion through to enjoying entertainment."

"...place for gatherings and events."

"...place to meet friends as its central for buses and both train stations."

With 102 responses, it is clear that many people view George Square as a primary meeting point, where people can gather and protest. Responses ranged from those who go to George Square to meet friends and socialise, and those who gather for political reasons or for entertainment and a sense of congregation.

George Square is Glasgow's... tourist attraction. (96)

"...opportunity to Include stands which show the history of Glasgow and how the square has evolved over time, make it a more interesting place of social learning for tourists and Glaswegians, a lot of our cities history is being forgotten."

"...sadly only a poor spot for tourist photos which under delivers surrounded by noisy heavy traffic."

"...one of the few large public spaces in the city centre where people can take a seat and reflect on things, just have a break or meet up with others. it attracts tourists too and for some people it could make them feel less lonely, to sit among fellow Glaswegians for a while."

"...area for sunshine and tourists and people watching."

George Square was referred to by 96 people as one of the main tourist attractions and is a place that visitors would come and look at. The responses were split between those who said that it was an underwhelming tourist attraction and those who said that George Square was a valuable space because it attracted tourists and visitors.

George Square is Glasgow's... history and heritage. (69)

"...there is so much to be impressed by with the architecture and history of the buildings. However the square itself is tired, grey and uninspired."

"...finest public place with so much of Glaswegian history about it truly a place to go and reflect or socialize so many important events held through the decades."

"...needs to add more relevant Icons to stand upon the plinths, show Glasgow's diversity and celebrate Glasgow's working class history. Jimmy Reid and Mary Barbour should get a look in."

"...centrepiece and should reflect the history and vibrancy of the city."

69 people felt that George Square is primarily a historic place which focuses on the history and heritage of Glasgow. The majority of these people felt that George Square needs to reflect Glasgow's history, with some responses stating that it already does this. However, a large number feel as thought George Square could do better to reflect the diverse history of Glasgow—both good and bad.

George Square is Glasgow's... embarrassment and shame. (64)

"...most boring landmark""

""...embarrassment. We need investment in high quality finishes that are durable and allow for repairs (e.g. granite setts rather than tarmac or resin bound gravel)."

"...disappointment. It could be so much better than it is. It used to be much more pleasant to spend time there."

A considerable number of responses suggested that George Square was something Glasgow should be ashamed off. People referred to George Square as a public space that is underwhelming and disappointing, as well as drab, dull and boring."

George Square is Glasgow's... traffic congested centre. (61)

"...a busy place with lots of nice architecture around it, but there's too much noise and traffic to appreciate it, or to really want to spend much time there."

"...a difficult to access traffic island—it requires crossing at two sets of pedestrian lights to reach it—that should be a civic amenity but is ruined by being a big roundabout. The movement of vehicles is prioritised over making it a safe and attractive place."

61 people suggest that George Square acts as a roundabout, with too much congested traffic and cars. This detracts from the space and makes it uninviting. Many people suggest that George Square should be either fully or partially pedestrianised which would make the space less polluted and noisy. This also makes the square difficult and dangerous to access.

George Square is Glasgow's... pride. (29)

"...pride and joy."

"...jewel in the crown."

"...people's place to be seen and show off its history and architecture with pride."

A small but considerable number believe that George Square is a source of Glasgow's pride, and acts as a gem, jewel, or civic treasure.

George Square is Glasgow's... place of memory. (19)

"...civic centre and war memorial. It should not be a tacky market venue!!"

"...timeless place an holding a memory card for many."

"...should be a place of quiet as is home to the War memorial."

Due to the Cenotaph and statues, 19 people think of George Square as a place of remembrance and memorial where you can honour those who died in past wars and conflict.

George Square is Glasgow's... home of Christmas. (18)

"...at Christmas it looks bright busy and interesting which encourages people to stop."

"...place of tacky Christmas stalls."

"...perfect place for events and our Christmas market etc. however I avoid it the rest of the year as it is full of birds all over and football fans when European games are on."

18 people mentioned George Square as a Christmas location, due to the market, lights and other festive attractions. However, not everyone thought of the Christmas markets as beneficial, with some claiming they were tacky.

What ambitions there are for the future of George Square.

How different ambitions were collected

There was three different ways people were able to share their ambition for the future of George Square—and collectively, across all methods, 793 individual submissions were made.

Future ambitions submitted at www.george-square.com	343
Paper survey submissions	199
Comments online or other sumbissions	251

Online at www.george-square.com, people were encouraged to either contribute to a public database of ambitions for the future use of George Square, or cast an 'up' or 'down' vote on existing submissions. To keep submissions concise, and aid comprehension a character limit was used.

Alongside paper surveys, people were invited to contribute their point of view on what George Square should be used for. This also contained a number of example answers (largely based on how it is used today):

- 'a place to meet and gather'
- 'a place for civic celebration'
- 'a place for the city's heritage'
- 'a place to move through'
- 'or something completely different' (with space provided for participants to use their own words)

The third way was through online, social media and article comments, alongside other submissions (e.g. email or postal). For evaluation purposes, all ideas have been pulled together.

Generally, submissions contained two types of information. Ambitions as to how the public space of George Square is used, and more specific suggestion for features that could be included in a design.

Ambitions on how George Square is used

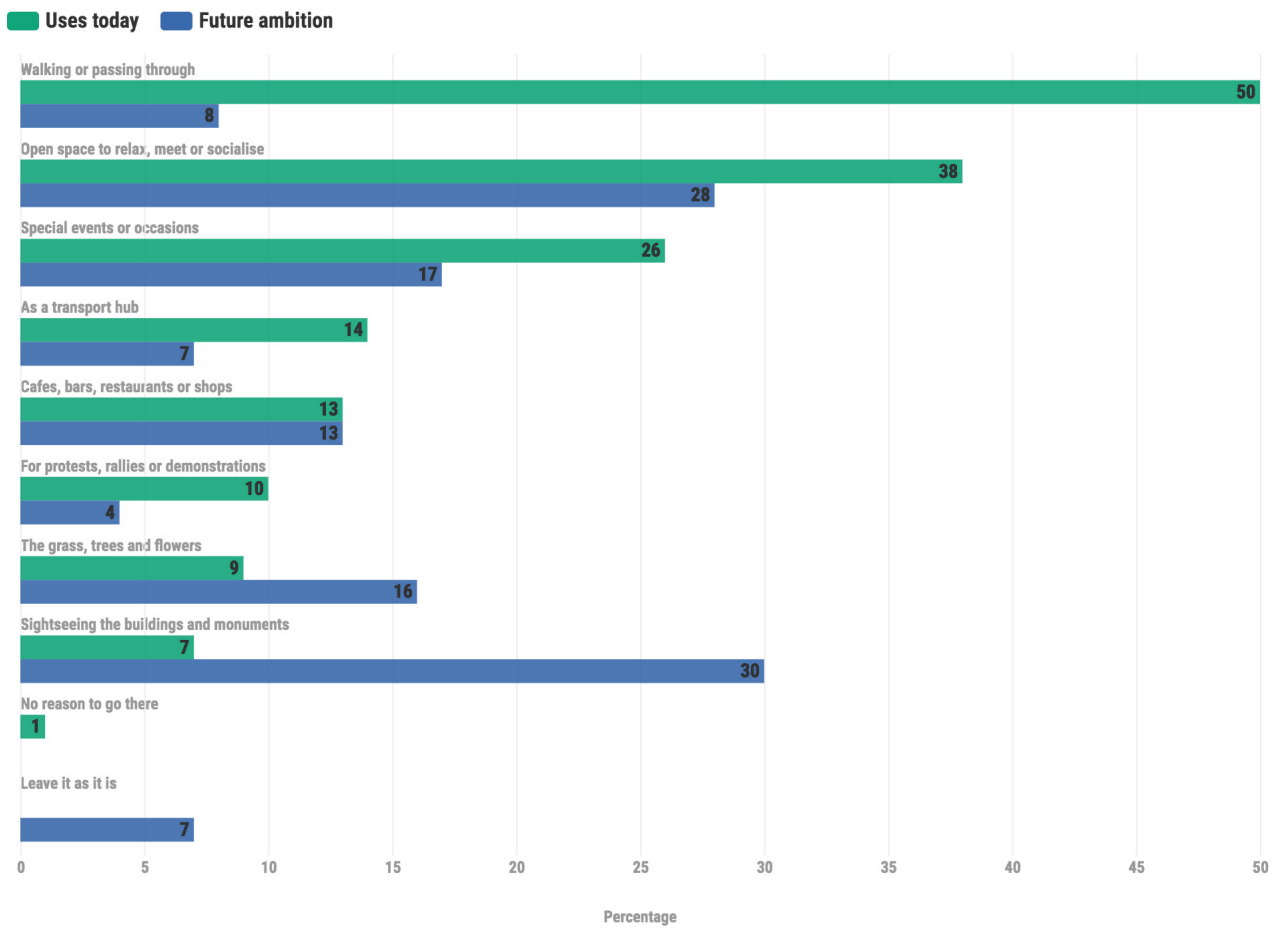
A number of people referenced, gave support to, or simply circled/ticked the prompts that framed the online and paper submission formats.

They were mentioned the following number of times:
- ‘a place to meet and gather’ (71)
- ‘a place for civic celebration’ (44)
- ‘a place for the city’s heritage’ (37)
- ‘a place to move through’ (22)

15 people mentioned, or selected, all four of the above options. However, the majority of submissions either added additional text or completely used their own wording for their contribution. Using the same process that was applied to find a common set of purposes on how George Square is used today, the chart and figures below show how often the same uses were mentioned—as there is no comparative figure for ‘no reason to go there’, this has been replaced with variants on ‘leave it as it is’.

Ambition for future use of George Square	How often it was mentioned
Sightseeing the buildings or monuments	mentioned by **30%**
Open space to relax, meet or socialise	mentioned by **28%**
Special events or occasions	mentioned by **17%**
The grass, trees or flowers	mentioned by **16%**
Cafés, bars, restaurants or shops	mentioned by **13%**
Walking or passing through	mentioned by **8%**
Leave it as it is	mentioned by **7%**
As a transport hub	mentioned by **7%**
For protests, rallies or demonstrations	mentioned by **4%**

While the sets of figures between how George Square is used today, and the ambition people have for its future are not directly comparable; reviewing the change in percentage of mentions highlights the level of ambition for George Square to be a place for sightseeing the buildings or monuments with grass, trees and flowers. Combined with the open space to relax, meet or socialise and special events or occasions, this offers an indication of what people would like George Square to be used for in the future.



Suggestion of features

As noted before, in addition to specific types of uses several suggestions have been made to the type of features that could be introduced or enhanced within any future design.

301 have mentioned a more sustainable or green George Square with more grass, trees and flowers.

219 would like a reduction in traffic levels, or an element of pedestrianisation.

125 specifically noted that George Square should be a place to sit, relax, reflect or contemplate. Terms like 'oasis that gives you a break from the rest of the city centre', are frequently used.

There are mixed outlooks on statues and monuments, with 89 mentions. These include whether they should be retained, altered in layout, or removed from the square; introducing new statues or monuments; and undertaking cleaning and conservation work.

59 indicated a preference of leaving the square alone, that it is fine in its current condition or that there are greater priorities for spending and investment.

48 included a suggestion of a water feature, fountain or pond.

32 have mentioned improvements to paving.

18 noted that George Square should retain an element of flexibility and multi-purpose usage.

17 would like to see the inclusion of play facilities that encourages children, young people and families to use George Square more.

7 mentioned giving Gaelic some prominent presence in George Square,

Online voting

Of the 793 individual submissions, 343 (43%) were placed in the online database at www.george-square.com. On this database, all ideas were publicly viewable and could receive a simple 'up' or 'down' vote to record support (or otherwise) to other's ideas. In total 14,446 'up' votes were cast and 4,414 'down' votes.

Outlined below are the 15 submissions that received at least 200 up or down votes. As the database only contained ambitions submitted directly online, they cannot be used as tacit approval for one specific submission, but instead show a strength of feeling behind different ideas.

Balance of votes between ↑ and ↓	Submission
1,351	Pedestrianise the roads if possible! Keep the statues but improve the look of the pavement! A "People Make Glasgow" sign similar to the IAMSTERDAM sign would attract tourists. Have market stalls/bars/ restaurants with outside seating!
887	More trees.
833	A Gaelic presence in George Square - e.g. a Fàilte gu Glaschu/Welcome to Glasgow sign to reflect the importance of Gaelic to the city.
764	Traffic free and the square made bigger.
570	More green plants.
547	Cafés, restaurants and bars with loads of stuff going on in the square 365 days a year, instead of it just being a glorified round about. However, if it is pedestrianised the roads around (many of which one-way roads) need to be redesigned.
459	More floral displays.
381	Make it fully pedestrianised with cafés and restaurants around the perimeter... a modern European piazza.
339	A main focal point in the city centre where it is safe and clean, with more greenery, almost like a city centre oasis.

Balance of votes between ↑ and ↓	Submission
262	A green, healthy space. At least partly pedestrianised, with fewer idling taxis etc.
204	The square should be the city's civic heart and focus for it's citizens. A place to see and be seen, a place that invites you to dwell.
196	The square is little more than a glorified roundabout at the moment. Less cars and traffic congestion is crucial.
190	It should be fully pedestrianised and lined with trees/greenery. We have so much natural beauty in Scotland and it should be shown in our city centre, not just concrete. Take inspiration from Central Park in New York.
181	A go to place that is the heart of Glasgow. More greenery and floral with seating and an information point telling the history of the square, the statues in it and the buildings around about it.
180	A true public space for people to relax in the middle of the city such as more bench seating and grass areas and even space for food pop-ups or artists. Fewer large commercial events that block off the square from citizens.
179	Stop using the square for fair ground and tacky Christmas market. Keep the square for the people with no traffic and nice green spaces and area to sit and enjoy the architecture surrounding the square.

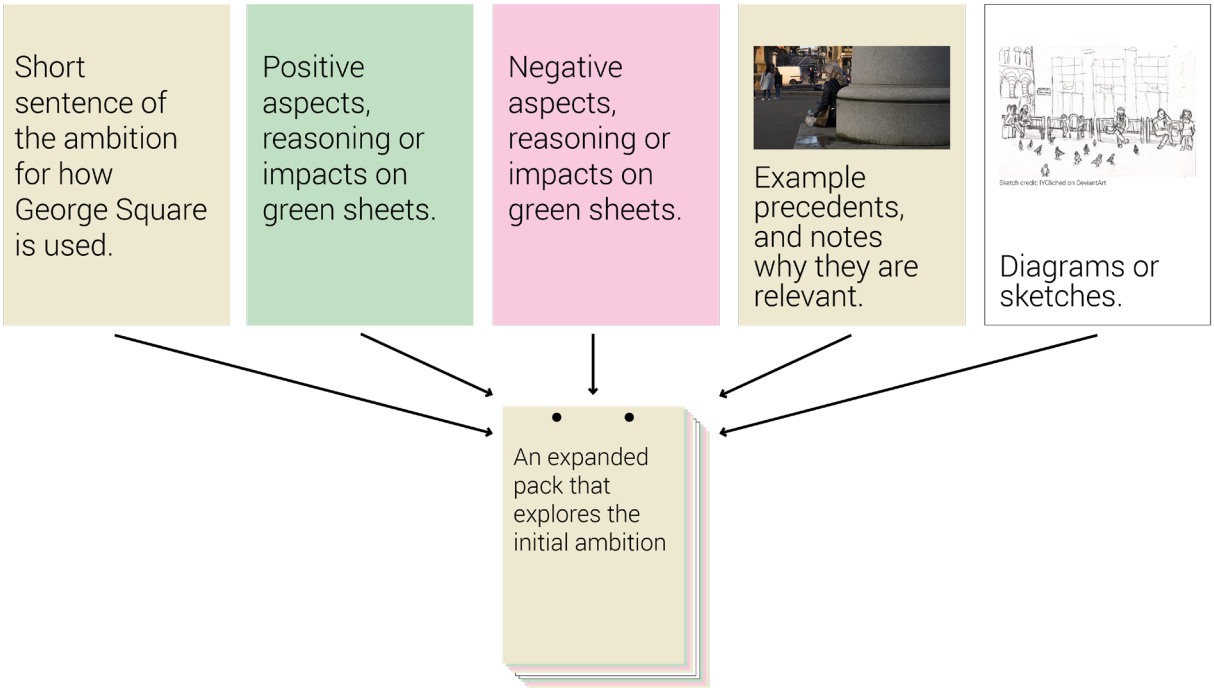
What could change in George Square mean for the people and city of Glasgow.

Outputs from Hands-On Workshops

A number of recurring 'Hands-On Workshops' were held to give people the chance to sit down with fellow Glaswegians and have in depth conversations about George Square. After a short introduction and 'conversation starters' using questions about George Square today, the main focus of the workshops was looking at the submissions for George Square's future. Exploring what they mean for people and the city of Glasgow alike.

The content and nature of discussions was set by participants themselves, and the engagement team helped people record what was being discussed through using A5 paper (as below), to create packs relating to a specific topic, or idea of how George Square could be used.

After each workshop day, documentation was sorted and categorised accordingly. These packs were then taken to the next workshop as a starting point to build out from. A total of 264 sheets of documentations were produced across all six workshops, these can be viewed in the appendix to this document. On the following pages are extracts of points raised or specific ideas documented at the workshops.



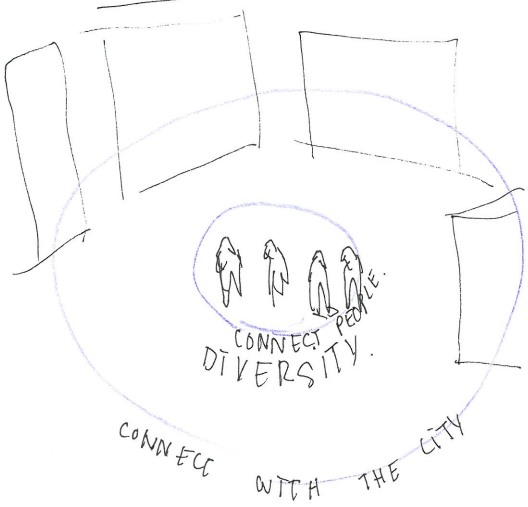
Vision

GEORGE SQUARE A PLACE TO BREAK FROM THE CITY..

WOW! factor! a place to inspire

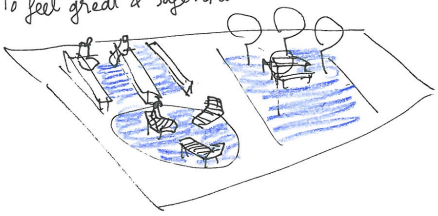
- big fountain/water feature
- lighting
- contemporary artwork
- 4th Plinth
- reconceptualize ~~one of~~ the statue of Queen Victoria - sink it into ground, put cheeky kid over head

BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER.



GEORGE SQUARE THE LIVING ROOM of the city.

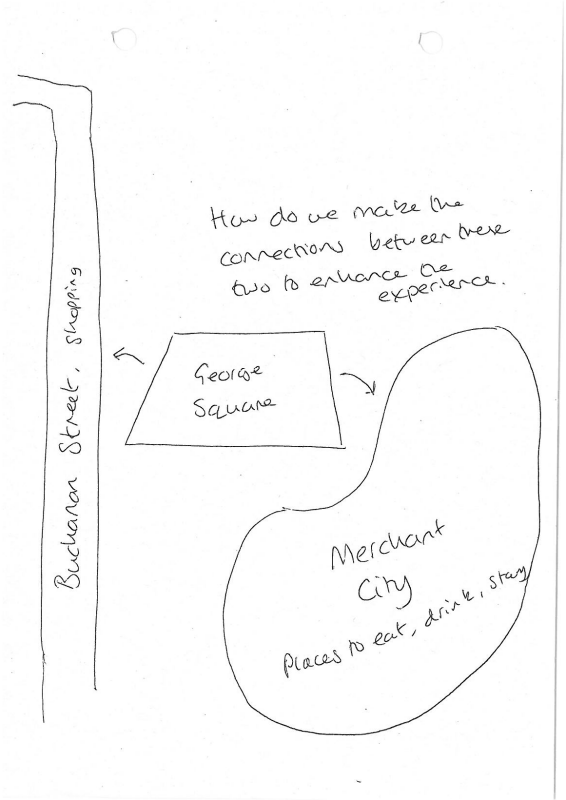
Arrange it to make people use it. To feel great & Safe there.



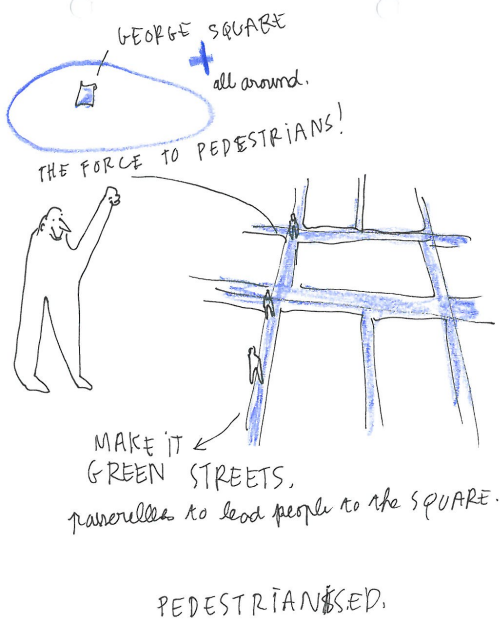
Passing or walking through

"Don't always have to use the square for something — it can just be!"

- if it's a good enough square, people will naturally congregate there, and ~~things~~ good things will happen"



As a transport hub



Remove ALL parking spaces from George Square

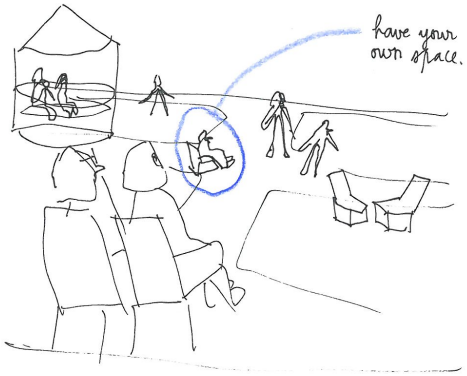
Replace with Reinforced Grass.

Operate a "GRID" managed kerb-space regime to allow deliveries etc. using reinforced grass/delivery bays.

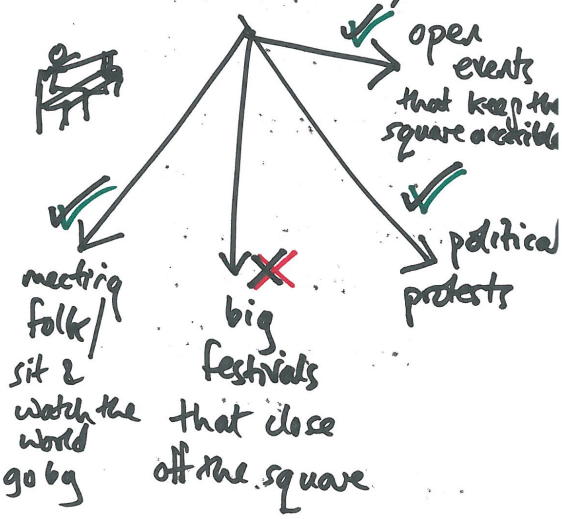
An open space to relax, meet or socialise

At the moment:
the openness is
overwhelming – not a
place to choose to sit,
even though people
want to

A PLACE TO
STAY.
TO WATCH PEOPLE

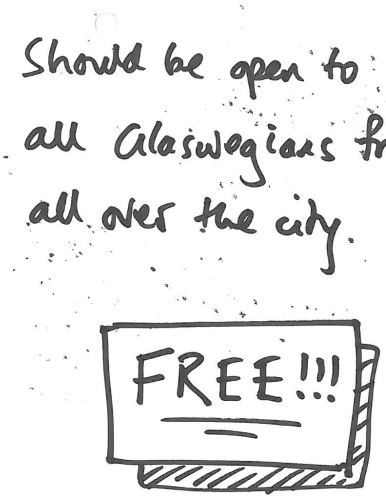


Space to sit / congregate
– sheltered (trees)

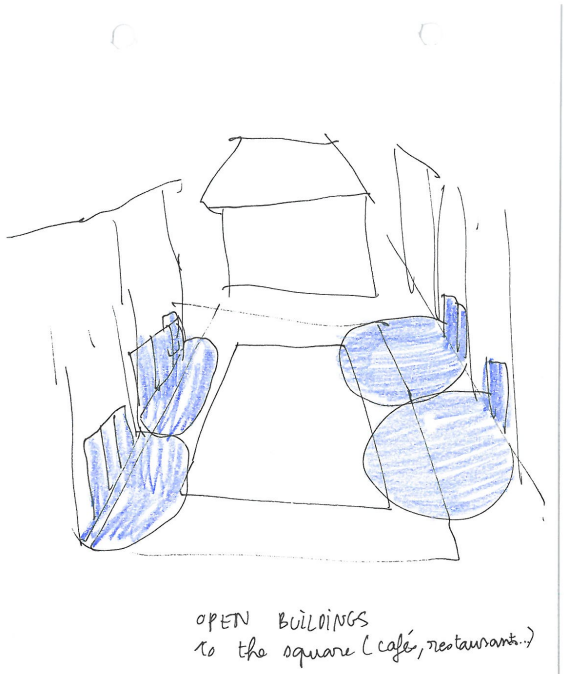


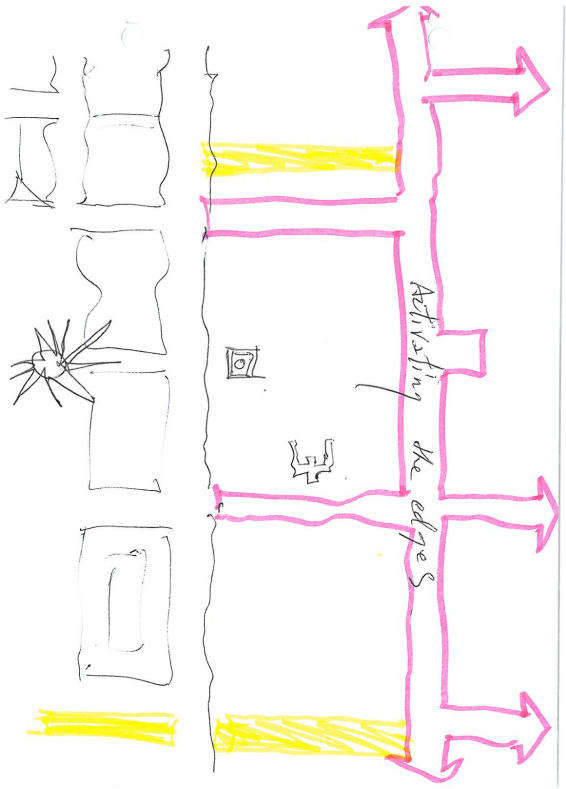
Plain, faceless, or lacking
personality.

Special events or occasions

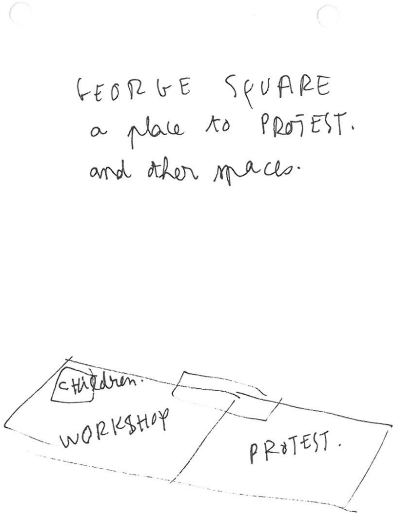


Cafés, bars, restaurants or shops

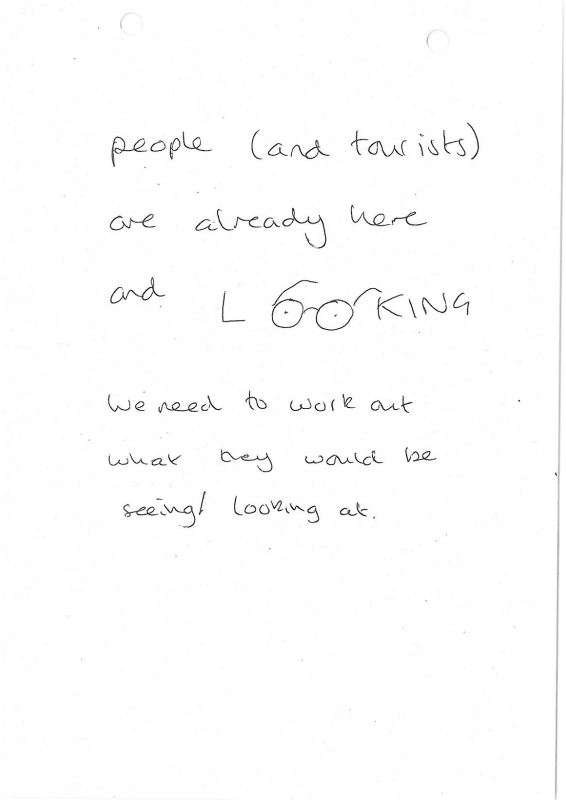


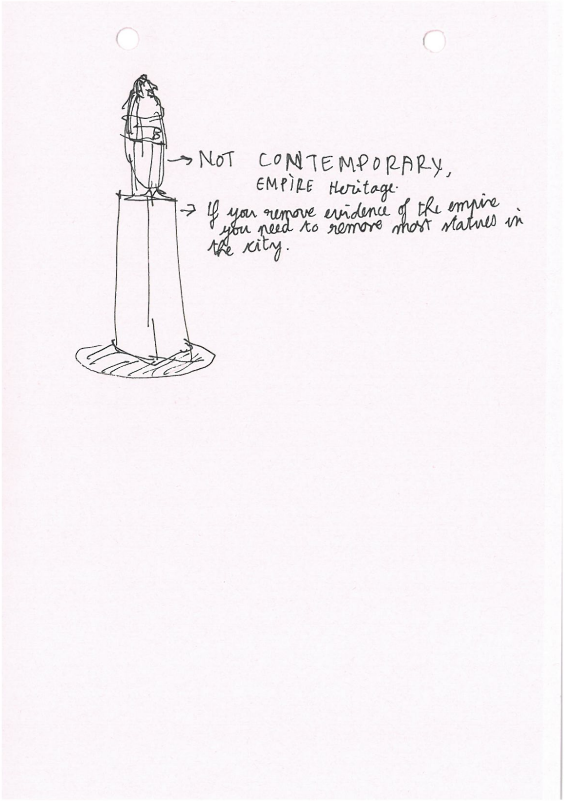


For protests, rallies or demonstrations



Sightseeing the buildings or monuments





The grass, trees or flowers

Trees

- that adjust to the seasons.
- more greenery/trees – supposed to the Dear Green Place – very little in city centre
- don't cover whole square
- don't remove the trees we have
- food recycling bins!

✓ Trees ✓

"Dear Green Space"

Issues: care and maintenance

Take better care of the square ...

... eg. conserve statues

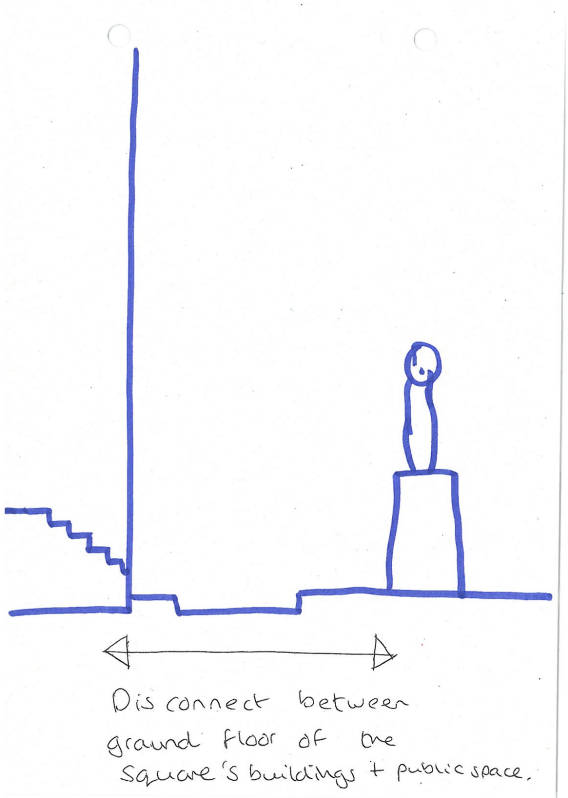
...(and new staff to add to them)

... less litter

Day to day maintenance, evidence of care that shows it is our sanctuary.

Surface issues are more pressing than foundational.

Issues: relationships with its buildings



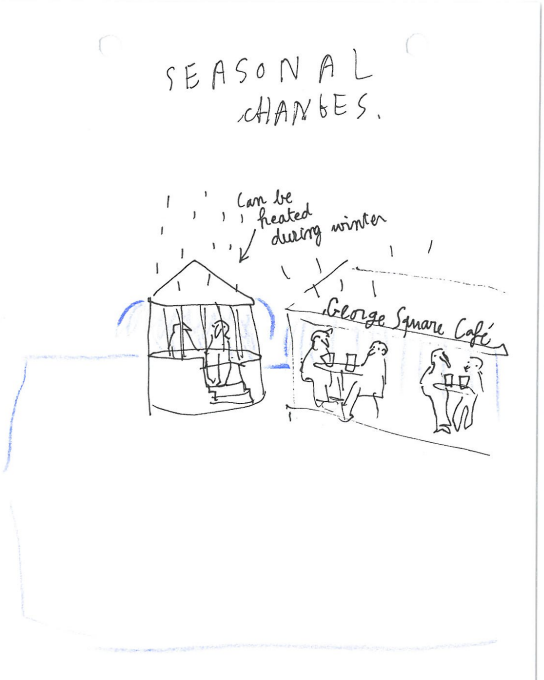
Glasgow's buildings are

BEAUTIFUL

including George Square...

... if you look up!

Issues: shelter from elements



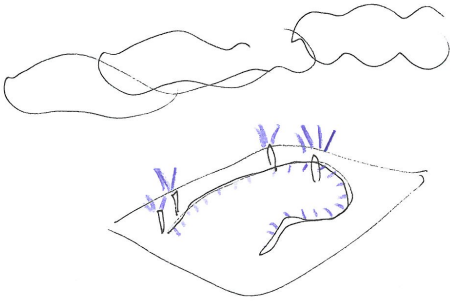
Shade / shelter

- trees
- sails
- beautiful constructions

This should be something that we are good at in Glasgow.

The grass, trees or flowers

LIGHTNING
THAT REACTS TO
THE WEATHER.



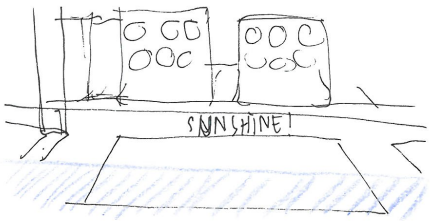
This could be making the square a modern edge (the lighting more than the fountains).

Miscellaneous (but important)

What's underground?

Is this an underutilised asset.

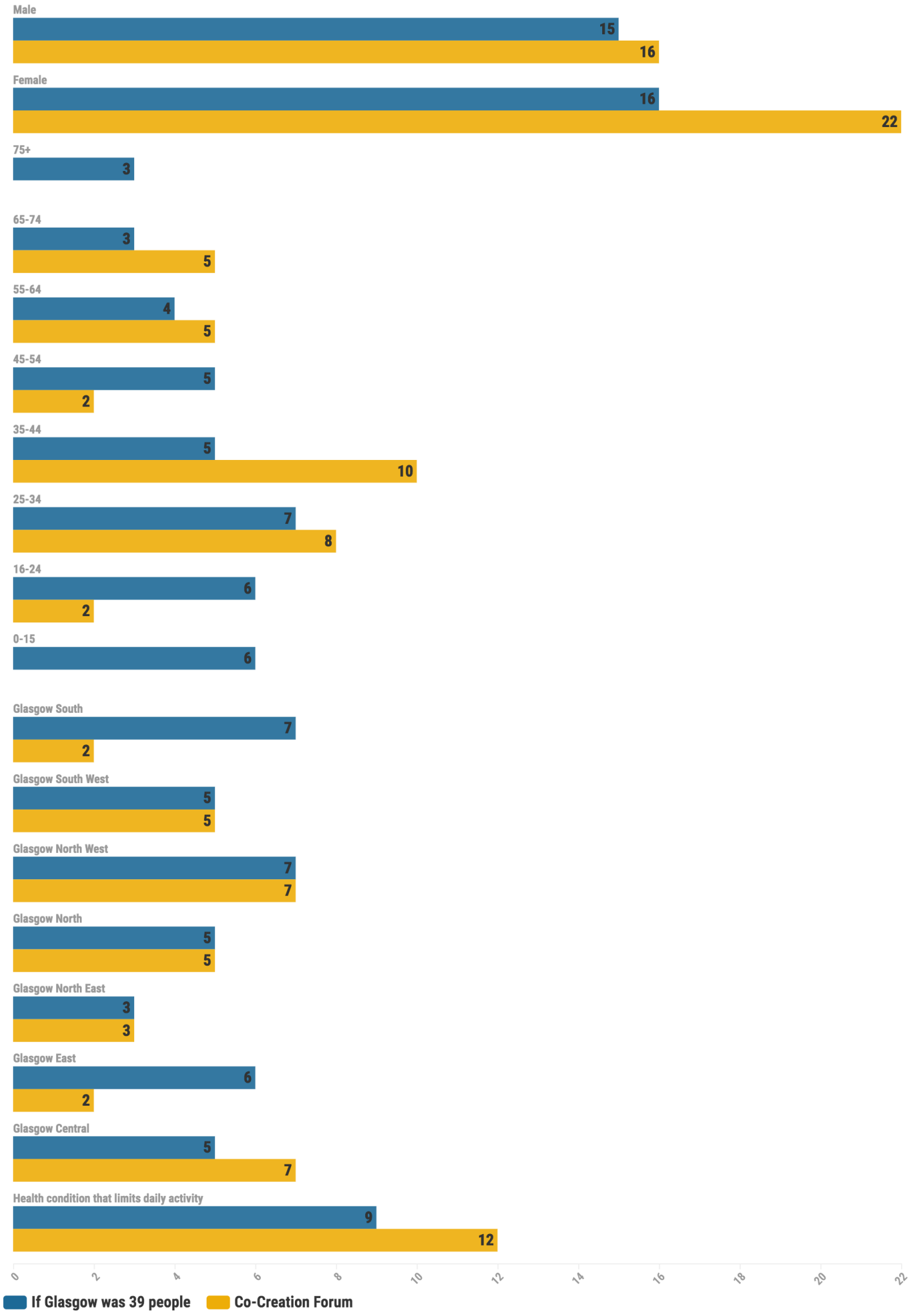
A split between grand floor of somewhere 'to be lazy' and then something to do.



Outputs from Co-Creation Forum

After the main conversation activity had drawn to a close on the 30th of October, the initial results were analysed to see what the city had been saying. On the 6th of November a Co-Creation Forum was brought together to consider the results and use them to test different ways that they can be implemented. The Co-Creation forum was a half-day event. Participants were circulated across five groups each of which had a spread of ages, and two facilitators (per group) to aid discussion and record proceedings.

In order to convene a forum that best reflected the population of Glasgow as a whole, people were invited to apply to attend. From this pool around 50 people were randomly selected and 39 of these were attended. The chart below shows in blue what the demographics would be if Glasgow was only 39 people, and in yellow the number from each demographic of Co-Creation Forum attendees.


Male
15
16
Female
16
22
75+
3
65-74
3
5
55-64
4
5
45-54
5
2
35-44
5
10
25-34
7
8
16-24
6
2
0-15
6
Glasgow South
7
2
Glasgow South West
5
5
Glasgow North West
7
7
Glasgow North
5
5
Glasgow North East
3
3
Glasgow East
6
2
Glasgow Central
5
7
Health condition that limits daily activity
9
12
0
2
4
6
8
10
12
14
16
18
20
22
If Glasgow was 39 people
Co-Creation Forum

Following introductory presentations—that shared insights and different points of views from the main conversation period—the first task compared how the participants use George Square in comparison to the overall citywide conversation findings. This was then used for the second task, which is to consider the different ways George Square is used today (and any additional ones suggested by participants), and within each group prioritise each use for the future on a scale between high priority and low priority. The collective results from across the forum are shown below.

Use	**Group**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
An open space to relax, meet or socialise.		HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
For protests, rallies or demonstrations.		HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	MID
Passing or walking through.		HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	LOW
The grass, trees or flowers.		HIGH	HIGH	MID	HIGH	HIGH
Special events or occasions.		HIGH	MID	HIGH	LOW	MID
As a transport hub.		HIGH	MID	MID	HIGH	LOW
Cafés, bars, restaurants and shops.		HIGH	MID	MID	MID	MID
Sightseeing the buildings and monuments.		HIGH	MID	MID	LOW	MID

Based on the discussions that had taken place, participants were asked to offer an opinion on whether it is 'time for change?' in George Square:

- Yes, and the conditions they as an individual would place on any change, or
- No, and the reasons why not.

Strikingly all 39 participants selected 'yes', but it has to be noted that these were conditional on the reasons they outlined for change.

This exercise echoed a similar section of discussion at the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce event on the 28th of October where ten representatives answered yes, three maybe with conditions and zero noes.

Collectively between the Co-Creation Forum and the Chamber of Commerce the reasons given are summarised below, represented by the shared sentiment, the number of times recorded in brackets—note, some participants will have given more than one distinct reason—and if necessitated a written explanation of the reasons. Any example quotes from participants are also noted in *italics*.

Bold Vision (21)

"But not 'death by committee' and so compromised that the end result actually pleases no-one/compromise the square even further. Integrity. Have a vision."

The majority of participants suggested that George Square as it is today doesn't reflect the current development of the city in the 21st century. George Square must be inspiring and contemporary, with a "radical and strategic vision", creating a beautiful and welcoming space. There is a need for George Square to "let go of its Victorian past" in order to become a square that reflects its place as a current—not purely historic—"world class city."

Reduce Traffic Levels (18)

"Eliminate motorised vehicles due to air pollution. Make the square more pedestrian friendly. Currently a glorified roundabout."

Eighteen people said that any development of George Square must reduce or remove traffic around the square in order to make the space environmentally sustainable and friendly to pedestrians. Any reduction in traffic must be part of a strategic plan of traffic flow throughout the city centre.

Statues (11)

"Get rid of 'pale male' statues, add in art/feature/installation that people can interact with (water features using rain water, fish, bird, bell, tree-related). Replace old monuments with above, and if needed, personal tributes to individuals who are important to the people of Glasgow today."

Eleven participants said that the current statues and monuments should be removed, replaced or updated. There was concern that the 'pale male' and historic and colonial statues do not reflect Glasgow today. People were keen to see contemporary statues of people who are relevant to Glasgow's recent history ("Nelson Mandela, Billy Connolly, Rennie Mackintosh") or of ordinary Glaswegians who have contributed to the city. Contemporary artistic installations or sculptures to replace or combine with historic statues were seen as an opportunity to address the old fashioned statues and monuments.

History and Heritage (11)

"Share what we're proud of (social history i.e. Mandela's Freedom of City) but also mark what we're not proud of (explanation of slave trade source of wealth, many streets name for traders or irrelevant royals from years ago)."

An equal number of people (11) also said that either the statues should be kept or that at least George Square's position as "stage for heritage" should be maintained. George Square should keep a record of the social history of Glasgow and there needs to be more information on Glasgow's history, the history of the statues and of the architecture. A number of people felt that rather than get rid of the colonial statues, Glasgow should "keep what we're not proud of", with an explanation of how much of Glasgow's wealth came from the slave trade and colonialism.

Accessible (10)

"Yes as it currently doesn't work for all so doesn't work for anyone. Not accessible to partially sighted, for example. Statues no Braille or audio description. Needs to be accessible (in all senses), welcoming, open, reflect Glasgow as it is now and our traditions."

It is important that George Square is accessible. This means accessible in terms of use, so that no one's access is restricted due to conflicting events, activities or functions of the square. It also means accessible in relation to people's different mobility and access needs. The square should be designed with disabled access in mind.

More greenery and trees (9)

Focus on community and social events, not commercial. Events should reflect diversity of Glasgow (9)

Redevelopment should be part of strategic plan, e.g. Avenues programme (8)

More and/or better seating (6)

Improved lighting (6)

Attractive and welcoming to tourists, recognising George Square as 'where people start their journey' (5)

Repaved resurfaced public space (5)

Maintain "democratic space" for demonstrations and protests (3)

Move Cenotaph (3)

Space and monuments need to be accessible to blind and partially sighted, e.g. Braille and audio guides (3)

Noise pollution needs to be tackled (2)

Clean up (2)

Funds shouldn't be diverted from social services to pay for redevelopment (2)

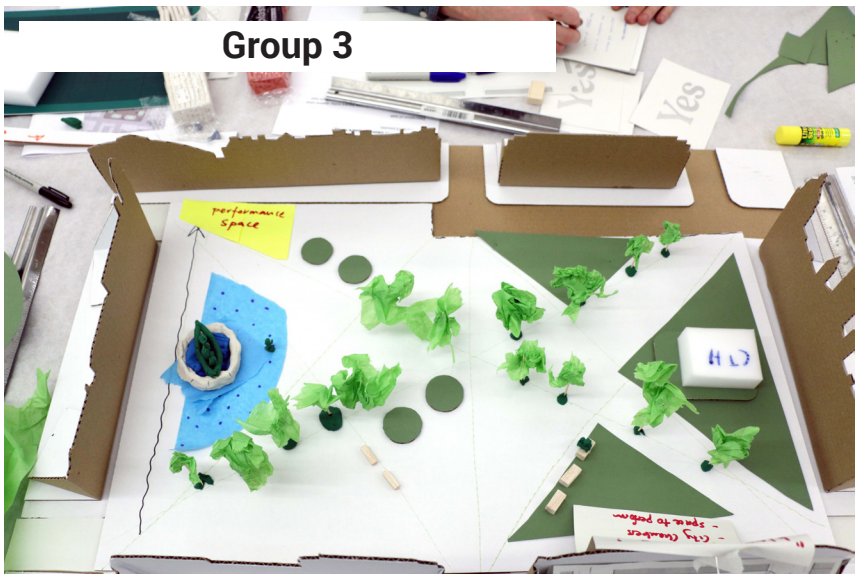
Better use of what's already there (2)

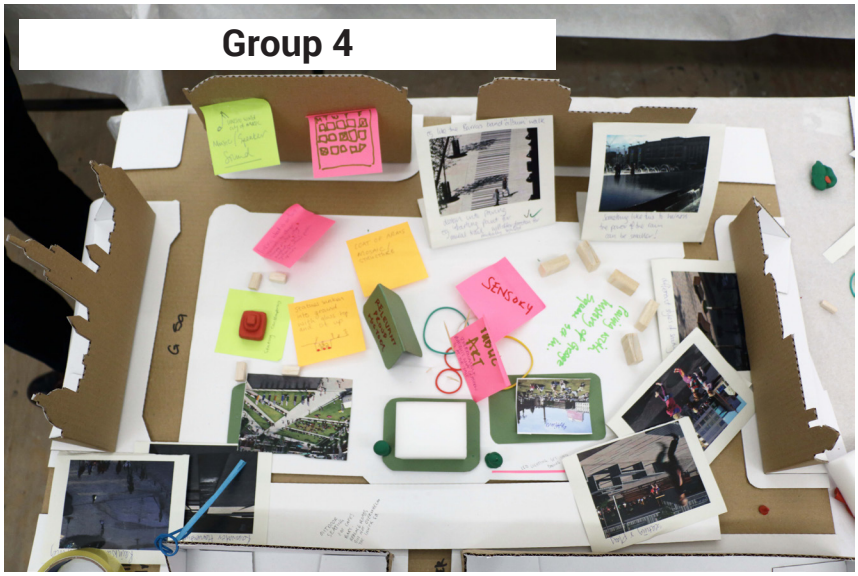
Need to give people a reason to go there (2)

The final key task of the forum was to illustrate the principles that had been discussed—the priorities of uses, and the conditions they would attach to a change—through model-making. Groups were given a base model of George Square as it is today, with an outline of paved areas and surrounding buildings.

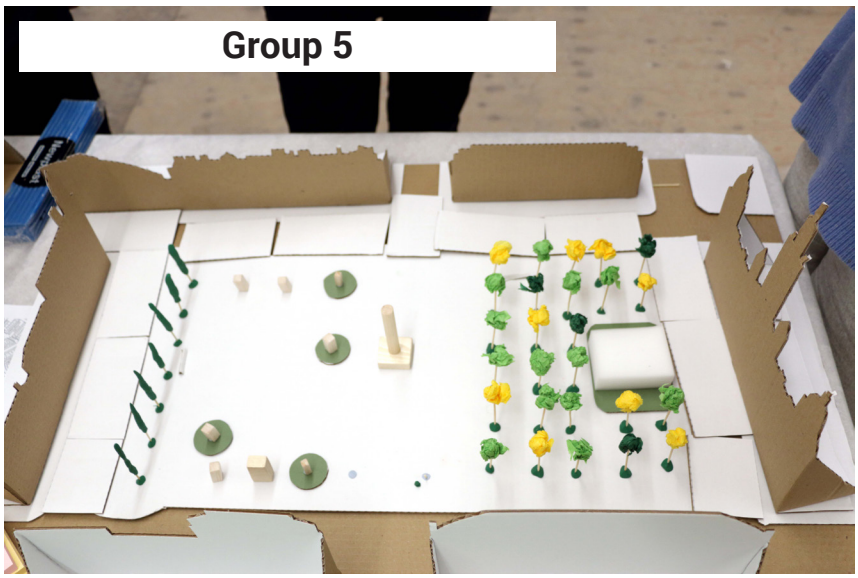
Group 1

Group 2





Note: this group decided to not focus on the spatial layout, but note the ingredients they thought important to include.



Note: one of the participants had prepared a vision and model parts in advance and brought it on the day.

Event Feedback

27 (70%) of participants completed an evaluation form and the close of the event, and the headline feedback from these found that:

- participants overwhelmingly enjoyed the event and felt that they were able to contribute their voice to the day's proceedings;
- while most were happy with the pace and timing of the tasks, some felt it was too fast;
- all would be interested in attending similar events on George Square.

Conclusion: Is it time for change?

Is it time for change?

The citizens of Glasgow have indicated that a change is required for George Square to meet their needs and aspirations.

Most of the top words/phrases used to describe it today support this alone, but also indicate that balance is required if change is to be delivered. A balance needs to be struck between the history of George Square (as a place and the items within it), respecting the aspects that people admire and turning some of the most-used negative words used to describe it today. So that change facilitates George Square becoming a public space that is ~~under~~ valued, ~~un~~attractive and ~~nothing~~ special.

As can be seen at the Co-Creation Forum where people sat down to understand different perspectives and consider change, there is a desire for it. But there are a number of reasons or caveats to build that case for change. This includes making considerable quality and investment so any redesign is done carefully and serves the city for the foreseeable future.

Recommendations to move forward

To take the citizen's aspirations forward, an appropriate process must be actioned.

The successful redesign of the Square will rely on understanding a clear set of parameters that should then form a detailed design brief.

The two main parameters still to be achieved before kickstarting a design brief are:

Detailing what innovative operations and management opportunities are possible for the future use of George Square through a tested, cross-service redesign.

Defining the redesign and reduction of streets around the Square through the Avenues project.

This will enable a clear design vision for George Square to be delivered within the wider city centre context. To support the exploration and definition of these parameters, the findings give a number of pointers about both the management of the Square and its future design.

The findings for management and design must be treated collectively in both setting the parameters for the design brief and for delivering the redesign itself.

A. Management

Key findings from the citywide conversation are:

A.1 George Square is special. It is the city's main central civic space and has a special place in citizens' hearts.

The Square needs to receive the highest standards of management and maintenance. Events that take place on the Square must benefit and be accessible to all citizens.

A.2 George Square should be a place for the common good of Glasgow, so that it predominantly offers free space that can be enjoyed by anyone at any time.

A fundamental principle of the future management of the Square should be that any special use of the Square also keeps it open and free to access for other purposes. This means, for example, that commercial use of the Square should be limited to certain parts which do not interfere with public routes across the Square or the ability for the public to enjoy space, heritage and views.

A.3 George Square is one of a number of outdoor events spaces in and around the city centre, and its particular role and function should be reflected in the programme of organised events on the Square.

Glasgow has a range of open spaces in and around the city centre in addition to George Square, for example, St Enoch Square, Candleriggs Square, King Street Car Park, Glasgow Green and along the River Clyde. The events programme for George Square should be seen as a constituent part of a city centre events programme which identifies the role of each different space and the kind of events that are appropriate to be hosted there. The role of George Square should reflect the aspirations that have emerged from public engagement and are noted in this report. Numerous events should be able to run in parallel with an opportunity for creating more space for smaller events or components of bigger events on side streets.

A.4 George Square should offer citizens the opportunity to showcase Glasgow's changing creativity and invite visitors to explore the city's current offer.

Glasgow is widely acknowledged to be home to Scotland's largest arts community, and the largest in UK outwith London. In the same way that Trafalgar Square's Fourth Plinth offers people the opportunity to make artistic or cultural statements, space should be made available on George Square for this purpose. This relies largely on curation and management: it may need little or no design intervention.

B. Design

Key findings from the citywide conversation are:

B.1 The design process for the future of George Square must be rooted in public aspirations.

The findings of this report should be incorporated into the brief for designers, and it made clear that they are the starting point for the design process. Of course there will be other aims and constraints which must be incorporated in the brief—such as vehicle movement, emergency access and infrastructure constraints—but the primary drivers should be public aspirations.

B.2 The design process must incorporate meaningful public engagement.

A clear message from this public engagement is that George Square is a special place for Glasgow. This means that Glasgow needs the imagination and creativity that good designers can bring, and that those designers need to work with Glasgow's citizens to ensure that their proposals have public support and reflect public aspirations. The design process should be conducted as transparently as possible, so the public understands the options available and the reasons for making decisions that bring about changes. The high level of positive feedback from this engagement's Co-Creation Forum endorses organising similar events as part of any design process.

B.3 The design itself must reflect public aspirations, as summarised below:

(i) The design quality of the Square must celebrate and match the special place that the Square has in the civic life of the city.

(ii) The Square must offer attractive space to relax, meet and socialise. People should be encouraged to linger, during daylight and after dark, without having to pay to sit down, for example. It may be appropriate to offer limited cafe/bar seating if carriageways are reduced and provided that this does not dominate.

(iii) George Square should primarily be a place for people, not vehicles. The presence and impact of traffic should be minimised as much as is possible. This will require reconsideration of vehicular movements on the wider local network of streets. It should reduce intrusive parking while providing a direct link to Queen Street Station and offer more street space for cafés, bars and restaurants without locating these on the square itself. This is further supported by the 2018 Glasgow City Council consultation that found significant support for reductions in traffic levels.

(iv) Pedestrians must be able to freely move through the Square 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, without significant diversion. There are a number of key pedestrian routes and local destinations such as Queen Street railway station and the academic quarter on George Street and Cathedral Street.

(v) The design of the Square should accommodate outdoor events and activities in line with the management guidelines in points 1-4 above, including informal protests, rallies and demonstrations related to the presence of City Chambers as the focus of local democracy in the city.

(vi) Heritage and nature should be valued elements of the Square's future design. This includes consideration of:

- Grass, trees, flowers and water as a dominant feature of the Square's future, enabling people to connect with nature in the heart of the city.
- The interpretation of Glasgow's story within the Square so that it reflects and rebalances the honest story of Glasgow's past and present—whether that involves retaining all statues and heritage elements as they are currently or in an evolved future solution.
- Views of key buildings around the Square and wayfinding to explore the city further.

Acknowledgements

The Engagement Team would like to acknowledge the contributions of the following people and organisations to the facilitation of the Citywide Conversation:

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Free Wheel North

Glasgow Chamber of Commerce

Glasgow Disability Alliance

New Glasgow Society

Niall Murphy, Glasgow City Heritage Trust

The Garment Factory

The citywide conversation about George Square has been facilitated by a team led by icecream architecture on behalf of Glasgow City Council.

Glasgow
CITY COUNCIL